



# **BUILDERS OF HOPE**

**Arturo Quizhpe Peralta**

**Patricio Matute García**



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Workshop: INTAL-Third World Relief Fund, International Partners Meeting  
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*¡Salud para todos y todas, ahora!*  
**M.S.P - Latinoamerica**

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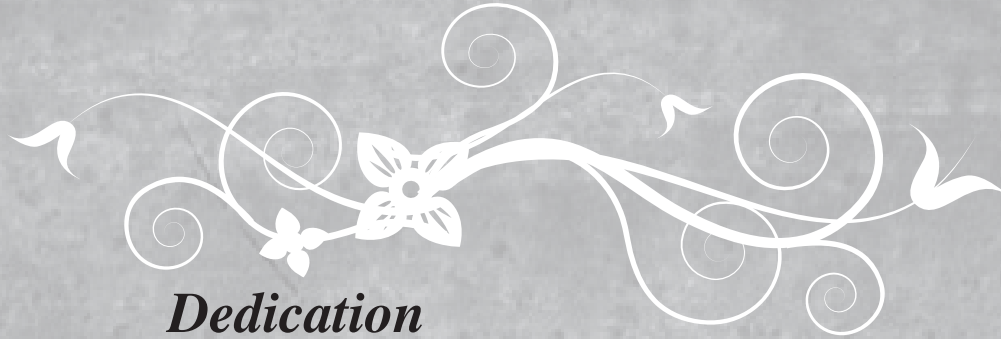
## *Acknowledgements*

To our friends in International Action for Liberation- Intal, for giving us the opportunity and encouraging our participation in the International Workshop: Third World Relief Fund, International Partner's Meeting.

To the People's Health Movement- Latin America for their support, confidence and dedication to the people's struggle for their right to health and freedom, and for trusting in us to represent them.

To our friends in Gabriela, and to the student, worker, and social movement organizations in the Philippines, who gave us their friendship, affection, and example to follow.





## ***Dedication***

To the Filipino women of Gabriela, builders of HOPE to their dreams, happiness and struggles.

To the children of Salinlahi, children of hope; to the Philippine people, bastion and example of resistance against the assault of the free market.



## ***Preface.-***

*“There is no room for sadness – everyone has fun. They sing, dance, clap, laugh, and party. Another world is being born – the world of solidarity - for the children of today; for the free men and women of tomorrow.”*

The Philippines: a scenario of struggle for Life. Perhaps the best way to discover the reality of our people is through the eyes of women – through their feelings and wisdom, demonstrated by their millennial epic achievements confronting all sorts of inequities, always made invisible by the dominant and patriarchal bias of official history. The profoundly human testimonies of the Filipina fighters express their great feelings of love for justice and life, as well as their strength and clarity of conscience. Their actions are not simply acts of volunteerism or charity, but of political conviction, militancy, and the difference between thought and action.

We can enhance our learning and enrich our own fight for health and life by gathering the teachings of these Filipino women, as well as writing an alternative, but real, history. We often feel overwhelmed by the difficulty of this path, by a certain level of impotence towards the dominant capitalism, and by the looming persistence of death and injustice... so these life stories revive us and give us new breath. We feel a brotherhood and sisterhood all over the planet with the hundreds of thousands of women, men, children, and adolescents who are fighting for the same cause. We are certain that we are building hope. To use the words of the Gabrielas:

*“...one day we will be free...we work for awareness, so that our people can be capable of distinguishing charity from dignity and crumbs from freedom. But awareness and understanding are not enough – it is necessary to organize, and then mobilize for the fight to genuinely transform reality.”*

These women transmit so much profoundness and richness through their work. They link health care with its integral and holistic dimension, compelling us to understand health as it is rooted in dignity, freedom, and justice. These stories are composed of life lessons on how to create Health by overcoming obstacles that are so often mere pretexts for inaction and by breaking patterns of comfort and false commitment...streets becoming classrooms, outdoor health posts, motorcycle taxis as transportation, huts as meeting halls, food on plantain leaves. A keynote speech, with all the technology in the world, could not equal the magnitude of what was learned through these stories.

The multilateral work this group does with women, children, and farm workers in communities and universities, speaks of the solidity of their organizations and members, and of their clarity. They understand that the struggle for their claims and rights necessarily requires the defeat of an outrageous and immoral system, which globalizes injustice and death.

We thank Arturo, Patricio, and the Peoples' Health Movement for giving us new arms to defeat desperation and to walk the remaining distance towards freedom with happiness.

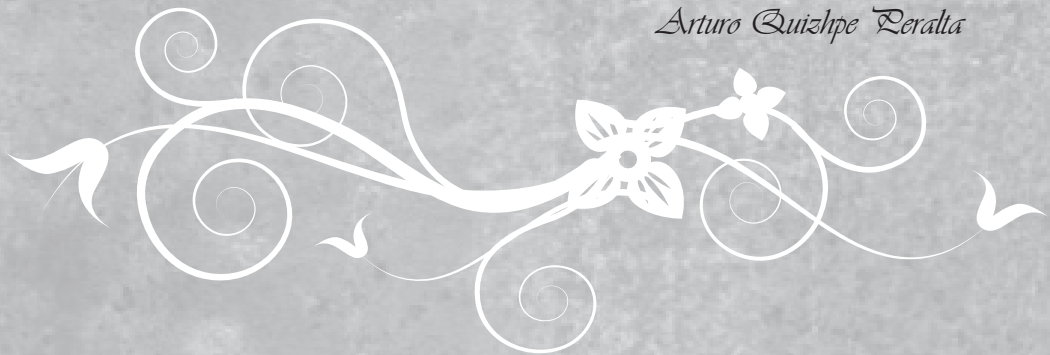
*Nidia Solíz Carrión*

PART

I

BUILDERS OF  
HOPE

*Arturo Quishpe Deralta*



# Introduction



*But the forest is still enchanted.  
There's a new hymn in the wind;  
There's a new magic in the dark  
green, (...)*

The Philippines is chronically ill. Daily, millions of children, elders, and women suffer from hunger, malnutrition, illness, and death. The difference between the majority of poor people and the few rich is immense.

The dramatic situation of the Filipino people might become even more severe if the privatization of

*A single fighting spirit has taken  
over...*

*José María Sison  
Prison and Beyond,  
Philippines, 1983*

health, begun in the 80s and early 90s, is not stopped and rolled back.

The poor, especially children and pregnant women, are ill. Their lives are cut short because they do not have buying power; in other words, their wellbeing and lives do not count in the marketplace.

The illnesses and health problems that affect the majority of Filipinos originate in profound social and economic inequities. Health and social justice are intimately linked. The illnesses that affect infants, youth, and mothers destroy families' strength needed for the struggle for survival. Low wages limit food consumption and access to health services, information, and education.

Health indicators may rise, but health for all is only possible with economic and social development, which should also be for all. It is here where the urgency to fight for the transformation of the hegemonic model lies. It is not enough to just achieve superficial changes, which relieve but do not eradicate the causes, according to a report from IBON, an organization committed to researching and monitoring the social and health situation of the Philippines.

### ***Health as a Right***

“Free medical care to celebrate the birthday of the Community Chief of Police” (Captain of a barangay, an administrative district). “Just today,” declares a sign posted on a street in Manila. We read this announcement on the way to a forum on the right to health. The sign serves as an introduction to our participation.

Health is an essential human right; it is intrinsic to the very nature of human beings and it is essential to the life and dignity of all people. Filipino peasant, worker, women, youth, and grassroots organizations have struggled for decades for their individual and collective rights, for the liberation of their country, and for justice and freedom.

Health is a vital element for development. It is necessary to have an equitable social and economic system, a development model based on freedom, justice, and sovereignty, and a quality universal health system in order to guarantee this right for everyone.

Health is also a social good that improves society as a whole. “Nobody chooses to be sick, but people have different physical and social vulnerabilities to illnesses, as well as different individual and family capabilities for confronting them. It is something that cannot be left to the responsibility of the individual, but rather to the government.” (IBON, *Chronically Ill: an overview of the Philippine health sector*. IBON Books. Quezon City, Philippines, 2008).

These are the ideas and concepts with which most citizens of the world agree. Based on these principles, and with our eyes focused on hope and on people's right to health, we live and share our experiences in the Philippines.

More than an analysis of data and figures or a presentation of statistical indicators of wellbeing, human development, or anything else, we would like to share with you, friends of the Peoples' Health Movement, our experiences, intimate reactions, feelings, and commitment – to continue forward on the path to defend the life and health of our peoples, with the responsibility that life and circumstances have given us and demand from us.





## ***THERE ARE MANY GABRIELAS WALKING***


Thank you Arturo and Patricio for this act of solidarity – for sharing this intense and unique experience with everyone. You once again demonstrate that exploitation and capitalism produce the same sentiments and injustices wherever one might be on this unique, loved, and polluted planet where we live.

Your words, aside from generating profound emotion, because they are filled with admiration, energy, and love, produce identifiable feelings of all sorts. We are life's militants or the "Gabrielas of the world" – we have held meetings under trees and on the streets, we have eaten simple and nutritious food on tree leaves, and perhaps because of that – for valuing those things – we have been repressed and punished.

We are inspired to know that these friends exist in the Philippines, and that, without having ever been there, we can tell other members of our Peoples' Health Movement about their struggle, their dignity, and their example.

I borrow from the song of our Uruguayan brother, Daniel Viglietti, who sings the Song of Pablo; I change it to Gabriela.

*"There are many Gabrielas and walking  
Along the land they sing  
With their flags of wheat,  
Of bread and wine, they continue fighting.  
There are many Gabrielas and walking  
Along the land they sing."*



***Carmen Mercedes Báez  
Buenos Aires, Argentina***



## *1. Building Life*

### *Gabriela, the name and feeling of a woman*



To feel, think, and act coherently is a constant challenge and daily practice for those who dream of freedom, the eradication of inequity, and the sovereignty of their country.

Over the course of many days we walked through and visited polluted and congested streets, inhabited

by thousands of men and women, children and elders. We had intense trips on metros, trains, buses, jeepneys, motorcycle taxis, bicycle-rickshaws and on foot. They were days of intense and joyful life, of learning, of meetings, of community visits, of learning about health promotion programs and projects, of walking and of searching for new paths to defend

the people's health. These days were marked by the presence of the women of Gabriela, and through them we were familiarized with the sweetness, happiness, and dreams of the Filipino women. The happiness, energy, and infinite love these women feel for life, their struggle, and their people were impregnated in our neurons.

We were curious to learn about their philosophy, their organization, their goals, and plans. Mayra, Obeth, Yhenn, Lenny, Elmy, Rita, and Phia are now part of us. With them, we learned about the wounds that foreign domination has produced on this marvelous, humble, proud, and dignified people.

After learning a few phrases in the native language, we are able to come to our own conclusions about the history of the occupation, colonialism, and the imposition of religion. The only way to communicate with our friends is in English, though we hear them speaking Tagalog and discover that they use many Spanish words. Ideas or things that didn't exist before Spanish rule couldn't be expressed in Tagalog, so Spanish was used. For example, the Spanish words for trash, business, co-godmother, co-godfather, rights, bus stop, spoon, and others. Soon we are using these words at every opportunity – we reflect on the trash as a result of consumption imposed by the “modern” model of civilization, and “business” as a mechanism of competition, exploitation, and destruction of others.

We don't have any formal interviews because we prefer to discover and learn as we go, by meeting the women during the activities that they are involved in –raising awareness, organizing, and mobilizing to transform reality.

The Filipino women have a glowing history of fighting against foreign domination and women's oppression. Gabriela Silang led the rebellion against the Spanish colonizers.

“Filipino women, along with the rest of the Filipino people, have a long history of struggle against foreign domination and social injustice. In 1984, primed by the anti-dictatorial struggles and the drive for socioeconomic change, women from all walks of life banded together and established a national women's coalition. We called ourselves Gabriela in honor of Gabriela Silang. It was the call of the time and Filipino women, like their predecessors in history, valiantly responded to the challenge of struggling for liberation. We believe that the freedom women seek will only be brought about by the resolution of the problems of foreign domination and political repression, and in the changing of patriarchal value systems and structures.”

This is how our friends in Gabriela explain their organization. They speak firmly, and in everything they say one can feel their profound conviction, their love for life, and their joy in struggle.

*Gabriela* is an alliance of more than 200 social organizations, programs, and institutions that seek to raise awareness, mobilize, and organize the largest number of women possible for genuine freedom. They organize and run training and information activities aimed at social transformation. They organize actions to eliminate unjust, unequal, and oppressive structures that arrest the development of Filipino women as human beings. They also promote national and international solidarity.

“Our daily task is to organize the fight for freedom of all oppressed Filipino women and the rest of our people,” says Obeth, the national leader of the organization.

On a sunny morning, over coffee and tea, we take the opportunity to learn more about the principles, philosophy, and perspectives of *Gabriela*:

*Question: It is a huge job to build life, to rebuild hope and to try to live like the millions of Filipino men and women who do not have schools, work, or a roof over their heads. It requires unity and working together, organizing, fighting, and a dedication to life. How can you organize people in the midst of repression and persecution? How can you work in the midst of the breakdown of society, an economy of survival, the deterioration of the unity of the oppressed classes and the disappearance of solidarity?*

A. Building life is harder than rebuilding this whole city of misery floating on a lake of waste. But we have to build it; we have to try, stone by stone, step by step, minute by minute, all the time.

Organizing the people is a way of bearing witness to our love for life, and bringing injustice and destruction to an end. We have to live and feel the problems of each neighborhood and each community. It requires patience, conviction, and a dose of curiosity. Our work begins with social and economic research in each sector, to identify the class make-up and analyze their needs, organizational level, and common problems. This is the only way we can define our lines of action, intervention, training, and organization.

*Q. Only hate, social breakdown, and violent survival tactics can arise in the midst of so much poverty. Is this true, or do we have a skewed view of reality and of the strength of our peoples? Are most poor people resigned to reality and accept it? Does that mean that conventional politicians can take advantage of that poverty by manipulating and humiliating the poor even more?*

A. Yes, we have been slaves all of our lives, but one day we will be free. This is the idea that must germinate from the heart and mind of each citizen. We work for that – to raise awareness, so that our people can be capable of distinguishing charity from dignity, crumbs from freedom. But awareness and understanding are not enough; it is necessary to organize, then mobilize and fight for the true transformation of reality. That is how our coalition, *Gabriela*, arose; it does not just use a woman’s name, but also her conscience and strength, and the energy of the masses.

*Q. We have read in the news about the number of disappearances, executions, and torture of popular leaders, workers, peasants, social activists, and students. The “Stop the Killings” campaign has*

*denounced state-led terrorism, violence which reminds us of the tragic days and nights of the Latin American dictatorships. How does one confront the violence and repression from hegemonic groups?*

A. If we wish to be free, we can only confront the oppressors' violence with strength, unity, and organization.

We said goodbye after photographing some of the murals and signs from the campaigns that these brave, happy, and sweet women work on day to day in the land of Bonifacio and of Gabriela Silang. As we leave, we remember the words of Che Guevara: "Fighting back gives us the opportunity to become revolutionaries, the highest level of the human species; it allows us to become human beings in the purest sense of the word."

It seems as though these wonderful friends, who at times seem to be like birds of the mountains and who know all sorts of dangers, chose that path.

That is the life and practice of the *Gabrielas*, committed to their people and to the lives of all women; happy during planting, ready to win or die, and profoundly convinced that "revolutionaries serve their people till their last breath." \*



*José María Sison: Un héroe sirve al pueblo hasta su último suspiro. Prisionero Político en un Comando Militar del Fuerte Bonifacio.*







## ***THE FIGHT: A HEALTHY PHILIPPINES***

Reading Arturo's notes on his visit to the Philippines brings to mind so many enjoyable experiences I have had in the almost 30 years of having a direct relationship with my friends at the Council for Health and Development (CHD).

In 1980, we began a series of exchanges between health promoters from the Philippines and from Central America. We learned mutual respect and to recognize our profound similarities because of our history of colonization, neo-colonization and anti-imperialist struggles. Throughout the years we often shared our experiences, knowledge, and feelings.

I am so happy that, at this time, as part of the long struggle for health, life, ecosystems, human rights, and nature, we can meet again. I hope that Arturo's vivid tale can help people learn about the Philippines, where communities that live in poverty work daily to sustain hope for a change in their reality. I hope that the account inspires and encourages us, and helps create new bonds of friendship and commitment.

***María Hamlín Zúñiga  
Managua, Nicaragua***

## *2. Promoting Health and Hope Training Workshop in Las Piñas*



The history of the Filipino people is a history of struggle and resistance against foreign domination (Spanish, Japanese, and the United States).

Repression, human rights violations, disappearances of community leaders, torture, and murder have been commonly practiced by the government,

representatives of transnational corporations, and hegemonic groups.

In the midst of these conditions, our friends promote health, build awareness, organize, and mobilize to defend their rights and to build a fair and equal society.



On Sunday, August 23, a group of friends from Ecuador, Belgium, and the Congo, along with our friends in Gabriela, went into the heart of the community to better understand their dreams.

### *From Quezon City to Muntinlupa*

The two-hour trip gives us a chance to see the social and economic differences, the modern and inherited miseries, restlessness expressed to the max, and the system's groups of privileged, "needed," and disposable people. We begin our trip on a modern train and then move on to an aging public bus that jumps to a start. We have to sit down suddenly, and after an hour we switch to a jeepney. We take a short trip on a motorcycle and then hop onto a jeepney again. There is a short stretch on foot, swerving among the multitudes of people and cars, and we are in the city of Muntinlupa.

The local Gabriela chapter greets us with energy and enthusiasm. Their office is in Barangay Cupang. It is a small house – a family lives on the ground floor and the office is upstairs. The meeting room is six square meters. Nora welcomes us and we introduce ourselves. The gazes of the Gabrielas are filled with much happiness and optimism. We feel as though we are friends; the empathy is mutual, and there is laughter from the start. Some take a seat on the bench and others on the floor. Nora explains the objectives, lines of action, projects, and structure in detail, alternating between whiteboard and computer screen. Time flies. It is lunch time – we eat a typical Filipino meal and we are ready to head to Las Piñas.

### *A open-air training workshop*

We get on a three-wheeler. The six passengers are squeezed in and, at times, the vehicle seems as though it won't resist the weight of its age, not to mention its passengers. Luckily, it is a short ride to the central station, where we get on a jeepney, which is a relic of colonialism and North American occupation during World War II. After an hour, we arrive in the community of Las Piñas. Nora, our guide and a health promoter, cautiously leads the health workers. She stops, looks around, and observes. The sun is intense and the heat is, at times, overpowering.

There doesn't seem to be a feeling of security here. It is easy to notice that the social disparities, injustice, and poverty, prompted and accentuated by globalization, have additionally caused broken relationships, insecurity, and all types of violence. We wait in a neighborhood store for a few minutes, until "Mona" arrives. She takes us to her home, a small three meter square apartment, where she tells us that she teaches cha-cha-cha, rock 'n' roll, and tango for a living.

It is three o'clock on a Sunday afternoon and we wonder if now would be the best time for the poorest of the poor to receive a training session on health. Nora reassures us that the workshop will take place, but that the real problem is the lack of a meeting space. While we are at first doubtful, we soon see that the narrow street fills with women, who carry chairs in one hand and child in the other. The beginning of the workshop is announced – vital signs and respiratory symptoms are on today's agenda.

The street becomes an open classroom. They are promoters of life, who have overcome the fear and solitude imposed by the system, by marginalization, and by poverty. They have dared to congregate to learn about and understand the economic and social determinants of health and to demystify technology and science, which, up until now, has been denied to the poor women of the community.

### ***“I am a communist...”***

The session begins by defining the subject, its importance, and the objectives. Then each person introduces herself: Who am I, what do I do, why have I come, and what do I expect. One by one, they begin to tell their life stories – many have already heard them, but to others, like us, they went beyond what we expected.

We visitors also introduce ourselves. Patricio solemnly introduces himself by saying, “I am a member of the PHM. I am from Cuenca, Ecuador. I am a communist.” There is enormous surprise – each person present looks to the other, wondering what could happen this afternoon in the presence of a communist. We are in a country where, though the communist party is legalized, being a member comes with risks (threats, disappearances, torture, terrorist accusations).

Enelda, perhaps the oldest of all the participants, around 65 years old, wants to stop the presentation. Maya, a health promoter, immediately jumps in to emphatically clarify – “There is a problem with the translation of the language. He’s NOT trying to say he is a communist, but a communicator.” Laughter explodes, and the comments and murmurs multiply.

Anyway you look at it, communicating has an intimate relationship to loving and sharing, and being a communist also has to do with loving life, equality, justice, and freedom.

Amidst smiles, the training goes on for three hours. Despite the environmental and physical conditions, not a single mother, promoter, or health worker has left.

It is the first time that we have observed mothers learning to take a temperature, to take blood pressure, to measure a pulse, and to count breaths. Working in pairs, one applies what has been learned on the other, and vice versa. Everyone learns from everyone else, and everyone learns a lot. These are skills that will serve to improve their own lives and to help others who are in need, at no cost.

The workshop is carried out without interruptions, and with smiles and laughter. Learning actually becomes recreation, teaching, and therapy all at once.

We curiously observe the deferential and respectful manner in which the neighbors cross the street – quietly and reverently, bowing slightly and indicating with both hands, asking permission to cross through the “classroom.” In this scenario, a shirtless thirty-year old, revolver in hand, followed by a four-year old boy, also politely asks permission to cross. Nobody flinches, because life and the workshop continue.

The afternoon ends with a snack and an evaluation, and, of course, photos, comments, gifts, hugs, and new friends. They never imagined that people from Latin America would be interested in the teaching-

learning methodology of Gabriela, a women's organization active in the Philippines and in many other places in the world.

### *Evaluation*

Critique and self-critique become the ways and means of individual and collective improvement. The participants, all mothers, explain and discover their feelings, difficulties, and obstacles, among laughter and applause:

"My arm was turning purple while my neighbor continued to pump air into the cuff. We thought that the needle on the gauge was supposed to go all the way around. Then we discovered that if my blood pressure was really 300 I would be dead."

"I thought I was going to hear a sound with the stethoscope, something like an alarm, which would be announced by the meter, so I put all my attention on the needle that measures the pressure."

"I never imagined that I would diagnose myself with high blood pressure. I had never worried about it or even known about it. Today I have learned that I am overweight, have high blood pressure, and that I should change my diet."

And so, the session ends.

### *Preparing Calumbi syrup and pills*

No technical or logistical problems are too great for the members of Gabriela; the struggle for health plays out in many fields, as life, too, is multifaceted. Just as they call to mobilize in defense of their comrades' lives, in the parliament, they also propose, debate, push, and defend laws in favor of women and the Filipino community. In the university, the student chapters of Gabriela organize campaigns to free the five Cuban heroes imprisoned by the empire. In the mountains and communities, they resist violations of the rights of nature and the appropriation of water sources. They denounce the perversity and cynicism of the multinational mining companies. The academic and scientific chapters unmask and reveal the truth about "socially responsible, environmentally just, mining," and other lies created, sponsored, and spread by the mining companies themselves.

In the poor community of Muntinlupa, a group of women promote training. They seek to end dependence and to defend and value ancestral knowledge. In a poor neighborhood, children, elders, and mothers congregate and enthusiastically participate in a workshop on traditional medicine and medicinal plants. First, there is an intense debate, then an exchange of knowledge of certain medicinal plants of the community, and finally a call to "not let these plants die out, which are so valuable for the lives of everyone."

The meeting continues, and they use the example of calumbí, a plant ancestrally used to treat coughs and chills. First they talk about the history of the plant, its benefits, its care, how we must preserve

it, etc. Then they begin a demonstration, preparing the utensils, cooking the leaves, explaining the concentrations, adding sugar, and re-analyzing the recipe. There are debates about the effectiveness of using one recipe or the other, and finally the syrup is ready. But the workshop continues, and now pills are going to be made.

The workshop ends and there is a critiquing and self-critiquing evaluation. We observe, surprised by the humility of these untiring builders of life. After the evaluation comes dinner.









### *3. A Healthy Mission*

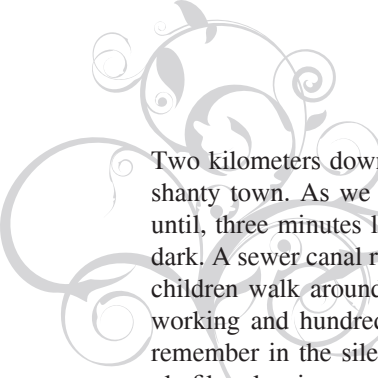
## *The “Devil’s Throat” and the mobile clinic in Santo Niño*



We left the organization’s office in Cupang, along with other health professionals and activists from Belgium, guided by Yhenn, Maya, and Nora, members of the Gabriela brigade. We traveled down the narrow streets of the town, and then crossed a bridge, where we could see the unbridled pollution of the estuary. We were suddenly in an open field,

surrounded by rubble, which we were told was the remnants of the almost 80,000 houses demolished along the train tracks. We took a trolley, which was a rustic vehicle made of wooden boards with wheels adapted to the train tracks, pushed by the driver. We commented that this was an example of creativity in the struggle for life and survival.





Two kilometers down the line, we walk through a shanty town. As we walk along, the path darkens until, three minutes later, we are practically in the dark. A sewer canal runs alongside the path. Naked children walk around and play. There are women working and hundreds of faces – images that we remember in the silence. We walk silently in single file, glancing around, shocked from the images that come and go. Our friends are familiar with this shanty town, as they are deeply involved with its inhabitants and their dreams and needs. In the middle of the heat, humidity, silence, and solitude come the greetings and smiles of hope and love; they even offer us food and water. On one side there is a huge impassable wall, covered with hundreds of wires.

Suddenly there is a bright light – we go up a flight of stairs and find ourselves on the sidewalk of a wide paved road, roaring with hundreds of cars. We look back and discover that it is a factory. A large sign says “AMSPEC.” We are told that this is an office supplies factory that makes things like notebooks, pencils, pens, etc. We walk a few blocks and again find ourselves under a bridge, contemplating the human misery of the “disposable” class, caused by neoliberalism and class exploitation. We are in East Kabulussan, from where one can see the Kawasaki motorcycle factory. We take a jeepney to Villa Santo Niño. A huge sign in the middle of a “cosmetically” designed arch tells us that we are at the entrance to the community.

“Welcome to Santo Niño,” says the sign, both in English and in Tagalog. We begin to walk through the narrow alleys of community, which are filled with children who play, smile, and timidly approach us. We are curious about the fancy entrance, but we soon realize that this beautiful arch is just

a façade to hide poverty – the policy of Manila’s authorities.

After walking a few blocks we arrive at the “health post.” The humble home of one of the residents is the gathering point and the meeting is held in the street. The Gabriela promoters explain to the inhabitants the reasons for the visit, and along with the local activists they begin to register, organize, and improvise a clinic in the middle of the street.

Our furniture consists of one very small desk and two children’s chairs. Twenty children between the ages of zero and five are given care. At times the consultations get temporarily confusing because of the language barriers between English, Tagalog, French, Spanish, and others, but the human language of emotions is the best indicator that everyone is getting their message across.

Three children are having asthma attacks, and many others have common colds. Practically all are malnourished. Some babies drink formula; of course in diluted, small quantities. While the doctors see the children, the promoters talk, fill out forms, and make commitments for upcoming meetings. They talk about the community’s pressing problems, individual needs, causes of respiratory illnesses, and lack of medicines and their high cost; but they also discuss the alternatives. And of course, they talk about the need to organize and about Gabriela.

It is six in the afternoon and we have finished our day’s work. The neighborhood mothers offer dinner to everyone. Then comes the evaluation. Each of the promoters indicates and analyzes the highlights and the problems. The mothers also participate and thank the international delegation for coming. They

also speak of the need to unify communities around the world. They express their happiness for having been able to share these moments. They recognize the friendliness of the health team, highlight the goodwill of the people, and emphasize that there is no public health dispensary.

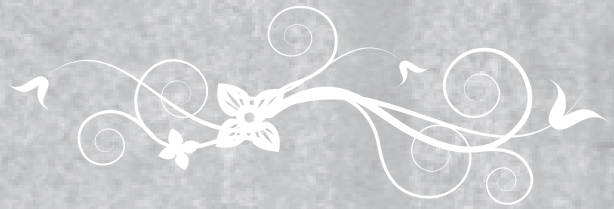
“This is the first time that I have attended patients in the street. This has been an intense learning experience. We have learned from you, from your strength and sense of solidarity and unity. You have taught us an extraordinary lesson. Your comments allow us to improve as human beings in order to be better health professionals. Today I have understood that doctors need to wear the shoes of the people, to walk with them in order to attain and create health. Thank you for sharing your friendship and giving us the opportunity for bringing part of you back with us. Maraming salamat! Thank you very much!” “Maraming salamat, thank you,” the humble but dignified women of Santo Niño respond, surrounded by smiles.

Night falls and the sky darkens. We begin our return, with the happy faces of the community’s children remaining in our minds forever. We feel different. We come to the community’s large arch. The women of the community, committed to the life of their people, hug us and tell us “until forever.”

We are all holding back tears; tears of indescribable emotion, and also of indignation at so much injustice.







## ***TEARING DOWN THE WALLS OF INDIFFERENCE***

When I found out that my friends, companions who have shared my same dreams and struggles, were going to travel to the Philippines, absurd questions arose in my mind – questions that would soon receive just the right answer. Why were they going to a country that we can just barely imagine? Why were they interested in going and what were they going to do in those latitudes?

It was not necessary for them to return for me to understand their reasons. These were revealed to me as if carved from the trunk of the powerful tree that they have sustained through their actions directed at constructing a society composed of good health and solidarity; a society that patiently awaits birth out of the tenacity of their dreams and their work.

And I find myself, along with others, faced with their testimonies. When they tell us about them, or when we read them, the realities of these faraway but intimately linked people become totally clear. We share the same problems and ill-fated inheritance of colonialism that is marked on their streets, on the faces of the women, children, and men and on their lives. It appears in conditions at odds with collective dreams, which are multiplying. These dreams grow and elbow out the indifference that shines behind the scene in the large cities, which are trying to hide reality. This is a reality that hurts, but also one in which the struggles that link different cultures multiply, with the goal of winning life with health.



***Pablo Arciniegas Ávila***  
***Cuenca, Ecuador***



## 4. *Salinlahi and the Children of Hope*



It is our last day in the Philippines, Sunday, August 30th. Our unforgettable visit and life commitment has been to work with and for children through various actions. We have requested a work meeting with our friends of the Salinlahi network.

It is nine in the morning and our meeting begins

with Phia, a friend who brings us by taxi to the offices in the Bagumbuhay neighborhood of Quezon City. After a few moments Bibbin arrives. These two women are trained psychologists, but, even more importantly, they are passionate about life and children's welfare. In the small office they tell us how children have been and still are the main vic-



tims of the authoritarian and repressive regimes of the Philippines, beginning with Marcos, then Aquino, and now with Arroyo.

*Salinlahi* is an alliance to confront childhood problems. It seeks to work under a progressive national vision, which contributes to empowering children and strengthening a genuine movement for social transformation.

We were interested in its structure, goals, and actions. We knew that it had arisen from the need to support the children of political prisoners and of the disappeared, as well as all those who were victims of state repression. We knew that in common “high security” prisons there were children between 11 and 17 years old imprisoned, accused of being terrorists by the government of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

“Every day we work and fight to build a just, free, and humane society that protects its children and that gives its children the opportunity to develop their capabilities, to be healthy, analytical, non-sexist and creative; for them to be capable of loving others, and their country; for them to respect and care for our environment. That is our vision and that of our organization,” remarks Phia, the organization’s spokeswoman.

*Salinlahi* is a network of 49 organizations that works with children in the fields of health and preschool education, in both urban and rural poor communities. They are organizations that are specialized in researching and caring for children who are in difficult circumstances, street children, and working children. The organizations fight child abuse,

sexual abuse, prostitution, and political violence.

In April 2007, the European Parliament, in its resolution on human rights in the Philippines, expressed its deep concern about the rise in political killings occurring during recent years in the country. It also urges the authorities to proceed with the due investigations. A United Nations brief on human rights, written by Philip Alston, indicates that the killings were part of a military scheme to neutralize criticism and that the acts perpetrated were being left to impunity. In addition to the political killings, human rights organizations were reporting illegal arrests, torture and massive displacements, which continue to this day.

Children have not been immune to this. The Children’s Rehabilitation Center, part of the Children’s Rights Observatory and the UNICEF Country Task Force, has reported grave violations: 7% of extrajudicial executions are of children. In 2007, for example, four girls were killed and accused of having been child soldiers, without any evidence against them; 45 children were victims of attempted murder, and five children were wounded. In 2007, the number of children who were arrested, detained, and even tortured and accused of rebellion, increased. The reality is that there are children in rural areas who, during their daily activities such as attending school or working on farms, are arrested.

In an intense but fluid dialogue, we get to know the hard and passionate work of these friends who are committed to the present and future of the Philippines. Phia and Bibbin explained the vision, goals, and activities of their organization in a simple manner. They explained the situation of children in the

Philippines. The statistics speak for themselves – it is one of the most unjust and repressive countries on Earth. We were most interested in two of their programs: foster parents and the Children’s Rehabilitation Center.

“Foster parents for the care, development, and early stimulation of children” was created in 1980. It was an initiative of a group of ex-political prisoners who created a cooperative to establish a support and alternative care system for their children, while they fought for survival under the Marcos dictatorship. Later their rich experience was shared and broadened to community based programs in pediatrics, Early Education and Stimulation, Paternity and Child Protection. Since 1987, all of the accumulated experience has been plowed into the Institute for Training and Investigation of Family Life and Child Development.

Phia explains the program’s objectives, accomplishments, and obstacles with so much patience, conviction, and passion. We notice that our empathy increases as the conversation progresses. We ask questions, interrupt, laugh, and finally ask ourselves why there are so many coincidences and similarities between our programs and actions, without having ever been in contact. We discover that we have been connected for many years by the same ideas, dreams, and friends. Memories of the Child-to-Child workshops with David Werner, Martin Reyes, and of course the unforgettable happy and committed image of Pam Zinkin, among others, come to mind.

We learned, lived, and shared so many things. Time

is our enemy – we want to know more about “Tumbang Preso,” which is the curing of children with problems using art and play for therapy, diagnosis, recreation, and as a right.

We want to learn about the Children’s Rehabilitation Center (CRI). Bibbin starts the presentation by telling us that it was created in 1985. The mission was to help the children of political prisoners to endure the trauma of being separated from their parents, as well as emotional and psychological problems stemming from repression and violence against grassroots activists and leaders. CRI has progressively widened its actions and coverage to different sectors of children, including victims of sexual abuse.

“We work,” says Phia, “to build a peaceful and sovereign society that responds to children’s needs and that respects their rights and those of their families. We promote and desire responsible communities and parents that develop the potential of all children, so that they learn, think, and express themselves creatively and critically. We also want children to be physically, emotionally, and socially healthy, with abilities that allow them to analyze and act in any type of situation,” she concludes.

### *Play therapy*

We are like fish in water. We identify with our friends because we share the same dreams and hopes, and because we walk the same paths. Our lives have similar histories and we have the same motivations. In a few hours we feel like brothers

and sisters. We joke because in essence we have known each other for many years, fighting the same battles for the same cause: health and life.

We share opinions and see that we have always been close. We create new commitments and challenges. Now we must share all of “our production,” which stopped being ours a long time ago, or which rather has always belonged to our people.

Our work day is ending, but there is no longer a reason to be tired. Hundreds of children are playing with their mother and fathers... with their foster mothers and fathers. Children and adults melt into one. There is no room for sadness; everyone has fun, sings, dances, claps, laughs, and celebrates. Another world is being born, the world of solidarity, of the children of today, of the free men and women of tomorrow.

Phia and her friends come with us to catch a taxi. We arrive in Quezon City and realize that we have lived intensely. We have learned and strengthened our spirits to continue believing in human beings, in communities, and in our struggles.









## *5. Stories that touch our lives: “I confess that I have lived”*



Images and testimonies, stories that have touched our lives; passages that we will perhaps never see again, and that we deeply wish never existed and hope won't be repeated; lessons that have nourished our hearts and minds, that have made us more human.

### *The girl that saved my tenderness*

“I haven't been able to sleep, the images come and go. When I want to go to sleep, the girl, the daughter of the family, comes to my hammock and with a sweet but anguished voice says, ‘This was my house and now all that is left are stones!’ She points

to a plot of ground covered with the rubble of a demolished wall and repeats, 'This was my garden.'

They demolished her house, and perhaps someday thousands of people will pass by or travel on the train that crosses through this land, but no one will know that on this spot a humble house was demolished in the name of development and the public domain." (Leo, French volunteer, Intal).

### *The community no longer exists*

"When I looked over the schedule of activities I indicated that I was especially interested in visiting the community of Payapa. I was enthusiastic about seeing it. I awaited the day of the visits. But it turns out that that community no longer exists— it had been demolished and the thousands of families relocated. This hurt a lot; I will never forget it." (Alfred, from the Congo).

### *Walking without losing sight of the horizon*

My vertigo had disappeared using the herbal medicine that Nora and her team had offered me. We lived moments of happiness and of relaxation. We tried calumbí for a cough and then walked around the community. We crossed the rubble of the demolished houses, which really seemed like an area affected by an earthquake. The hike began in the middle of the little paths of the labyrinth of extreme poverty. Little by little, walking became too dangerous. One false step could lead you, at best, to the sewer, or at worse, to the lake, the depths, or, as they said, to "hell."

Wim, Fanny, Nora, Edy, Veronique, Maya, and Yhenn are part of the team and we walk with them in single file along the "path," which crosses make-shift bridges. Patricio carefully documents everything, the keen and risk-taking social communicator that he is. He takes his camera along with all its attachments, including a heavy tripod which he never used. He asks for help... he is finally able to lean on a weak wooden structure until one of our Filipina friends, who are always ready to step up and resolve all types of problems, comes to the rescue.

I walk a few meters away from Patricio and suddenly see the platform of a small house – I jump from a board and crash onto a rudimentary roof. I fall... almost into the water. I wake up with vertigo, a headache, pain, and confusion. For a moment I ponder what could have happened if I had fallen 30 cm farther back. I feel confused for a few moments.

Our friend, Elia, who brings up the rear, takes me by my arm, helps me sit down, and comforts me. She asks for the others to continue and she stays with me. I still can't figure out where she found ice. Help comes immediately, the neighbors were quick to help... I am surprised and even scared; impressed with the care I am given by people I have just met.

I get myself together and stand up. "I'm fine," I say. "You can continue, I can wait here or perhaps where we did the workshop," I try to explain. "We never abandon a friend on the way," she says, smiling. "I will stay with you while you recover."

We walked in the direction of one of her friend's houses. We reached the house of Angelito Flores, an old fighter for the just causes of his people. He gives me water and warm tea, and offers me his hammock to rest in. I prefer to sit – I look at his aging, tender, and fraternal face – I feel as though I am sitting in front of my grandfather, and I smile. He says, "Friend, you have fallen once, but you got up immediately; I have been falling practically since I was born." And so he begins to tell me about his life as a revolutionary militant, beginning when he was ten years old.

After the death of his mother and the disappearance of his father, he walked, orphaned and alone, for days. One day, in the center of Manila, he came upon a huge demonstration against the dictator Marcos. Angelito joined the march. "That day I found my home," he says happily. "I found my family, and I think I found the companion of my dreams, hopes, and occasionally of arguments and headaches!" He approaches his wife, Enmi, with a mischievous smile. "Is that true or am I lying?" he asks her.

"Yes," says Angelito, "from that day on I lived with the students of the University of Manila. They adopted me. That was the day I learned how it felt to be loved. They gave me food and I slept in one of their rooms. They protected me and were my brothers and sisters. I learned to write, to read, and even read manifestos. They incorporated me into the outreach commission... no one suspected that I too was fighting the dictator's crimes.

"My conscience began to grow, and so did I, as a human being... and of course I met Enmi, who was a tremendous activist. We got married, but our struggle continued and we had to live apart for many years.

Now we are together again, and our children are the inspiration to continue fighting. We want them to have a mother country and a different world, which will only come from our commitment."

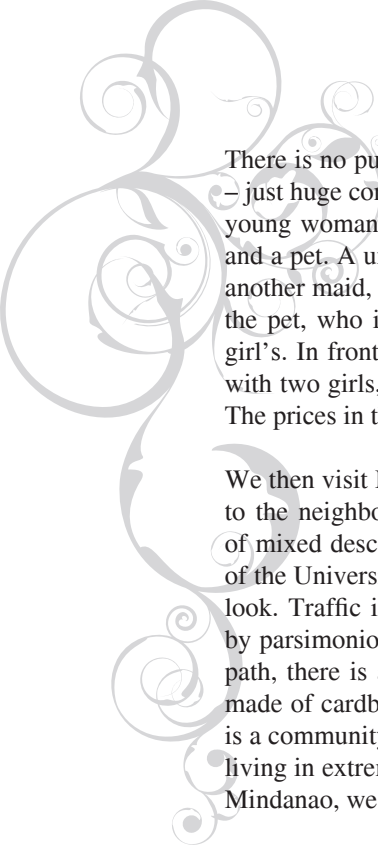
What does he do now? "We continue fighting, even though we are out of work. We are pushing a lawsuit, because I have been fired, along with other union leaders, from the Kawasaki motorcycle factory. Ok, so now tell me about Latin America..."

Two hours have gone by, and our friends are returning. A new session is beginning, so we say goodbye as if we had been friends forever. His aging figure and face worn from suffering have been pressed into my mind, but his frank and joyful smile come back to me every time I think about the heroic struggles of his people. (Lesson learned in Garcip).

### *Bonifacio Global City*

We got to know the Philippines through its people, struggles, dreams, and frustrations. The noisy streets and plazas that are filled with the sounds of thousands of motors are also witness to the enormous social contradictions and differences. The extremes are visible, and all you need is a little sensibility to notice the profound inequities of all sorts.

At sunset, we visit "Bonifacio Global City" with Obeth, Fanny, Alfred, and Patricio. It was constructed, they tell us, in an area of demolished houses of low ranking soldiers, who were relocated. But the city exists – the affluence is imposing, the differences perverse, and the security, isolation, and protection of the privileged groups surprising.



There is no public transportation in Bonifacio City – just huge condos that resemble five-star hotels. A young woman passes us with a three-year old girl and a pet. A uniformed maid takes care of the girl; another maid, with the same uniform, takes care of the pet, who is wearing clothes that resemble the girl's. In front of us, another young woman walks with two girls, each with her respective babysitter. The prices in the stores are very high.

We then visit Makati, a city just as modern. We go to the neighborhoods of the Spanish and Chinese of mixed descent, a walled city. We pass by some of the University of Manila buildings. We stop and look. Traffic is heavy and it seems as if life goes by parsimoniously. Suddenly, in the middle of our path, there is a Muslim mosque and small houses made of cardboard and pieces of scrap material. It is a community of no fewer than 50,000 people, all living in extreme poverty. They are the refugees of Mindanao, we are told.

The memory of Anashaw, the city built on the lake, the floating makeshift houses made of bamboo, the alleys, the unstable bridges made of scrap wood, of the city's trash.... The memory of the night, when we didn't know if everything we had experienced was a dream or a nightmare. Once again it seems as though everything was an illusion, a haze, memories of the tales of Dante's Inferno....

We return to Quezon City. The calm environment, the drizzle, and heat are relaxing. Once again the water embraces our bodies. But the memories are already part of our lives...we are different and cannot forget what we have been through.

We have concluded our trip...we begin the return. A 30 hour flight from Manila to Guayaquil, via Amsterdam, turns out to be tiring, as usual, but it presents an opportunity to relive our experiences, reflect, write, and continue dreaming of another possible world.

The voices of committed artists rise together with the mottos of the social activists and popular fighters. Art is no longer silence, it is life. Levy Abad Jr. and Dany Fabella come along with us and feed our spirit...they hearten and encourage us.

*“If you ask why the workers  
build barricades,  
and you learn that a worker does it to  
recover his life that has been  
seized by a greedy tyrant,  
you are a terrorist...”*

*If you speak of love, freedom and justice,  
as the correct way to obtain peace  
you will surely be classified,  
rejected, or killed  
for being a terrorist...”*

The hours have passed by and they suddenly announce our arrival in Guayaquil. We wake up from our sleep and ask ourselves – isn't all that we have experienced also the life of millions of Ecuadorians? Hasn't the people's struggle also been criminalized in Ecuador?

*"Together we will build the future  
with our hands,  
now we are here with our voices,  
to be heard from east to west, from  
north to south.*

*We are here today to be free!*





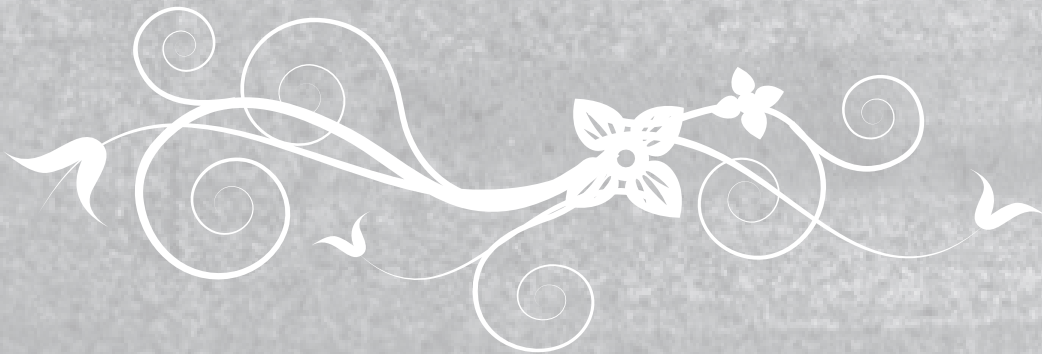




# PART II

## THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

*Patricio Matute García*





## THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES



*We have walked and enjoyed the view. We are infected by the spirit of the peasants' resistance and joy of fighting back; they have trained in hundreds of battles. "Good luck, friends," we tell them. Pau, a young leader, smiles. I shake his hand, and it is almost as if it is Che who is looking at us through the eyes of this young commander.*

*"We are here to defend our land – to plant not only melons, rice, and food, but to defend our dignity."*

*And the truth is these peasants also carry the dignity of the rest of their people, which is why they say: "Continue the fight and struggle of Abel Ladera for justice for the farm workers of Hacienda Luisita."*

*"ITULOY ANG LABAN NI KGD ABEL LADERA PARA SA KATARUNGAN NG MGA MINASAK-ER SA HACIENDA LUISITA!"*

*Arturo Quizhpe Peralta*

## *1. Hacienda Luisita: colonialism to the extreme*



We leave Antipolo and head towards Hacienda Luisita, the place of the 2004 massacre, when many peasants were killed or disappeared. We reflect on the similarities that this monument to shame, injustice, and the terrible redistribution of power and wealth has to other developing countries.

Hacienda Luisita is located in Tarlac Province, in North Luzon, and spreads over 6,400 hectares. It is the second largest property in the Philippines, after the 20,000 hectare Canlubang Sugar Estate of the Yulos in Laguna. It was bought in 1957 by the Cojuangco-Aquino family, one of a handful of oligarchic families who were “owners of the Philippines.”



We travel along MacArthur Highway, a “First World” road with toll booths, 16 lanes, emergency assistance, and emergency care posts. The vehicles traveling on this road are high class, including tourist buses filled with passengers eager to see the Filipino countryside and others transporting cargo. Along the side of the highway are flashy signs – Los Angeles 220 km, Valenzuela 245 km. The driver of our van tells us that most of the names are in Spanish, as a memento of the Mexican-Spanish colonization. There are many billboards advertising drinks, music concerts, household items, television channels, and a few scattered candidates for government offices. The outskirts of Manila are filled with luxurious country homes reserved exclusively for people with money, as well as satellite cities for executives and industrialists who come from all over the world to keep an eye on their investments, up close. But the contrasts appear immediately – we pass a slum town, filled with barefoot children with swollen bellies and shiny glassy eyes who are playing near the trash, men with gazes lost to alcohol, and anxious women.

It is extremely hot— about 30 degrees Celsius in the shade. Because we left early in the morning, we stop at a restaurant to buy coffee and some sweets. The place reminds us of a rest stop in the United States – the people working there are wearing the same type of clothing and there is the typical gas station and mini-market to buy snacks for the road. There are lots of people outside under the sun, working up strength to continue the long trip on the superhighways. I notice that there are many elderly European and North American men with young children in their arms. Their partners are Filipino women under 25 years old.

We continue our trip. Jayson sits next to the driver of our van. Jayson is a young Filipino who has been around. He is a true leader and social communicator. He is a type of link between the peasants of Hacienda Luisita and us, activists from different parts of the world who are eager to meet them. In the back of the van are Fanny, Veronique and Evy from Belgium; Arturo and Patricio from Ecuador; Alfred from the Congo; Maya from Varayan Island; and Josefina from the Isla de Negros of the Philippines. One can hear a lot of English, sometimes French and Spanish, and at times Tagalog and Varayan (ethnic languages of the Philippines). The camaraderie is impressive – each face reflects solidarity, justice, and the desire to break the pattern of capitalism and the exploitation of nature and people. Outside, the green countryside and golden sun fly by, along with the endless sugarcane plantations, rivers like silver threads, and people with big hats that seem as though they are carrying a house on their heads, working and loving the earth.

We are searching for the hidden truth – the other face of “developmentalism,” which treats humans like machines and monopolizes the land in a few hands. It promotes monoculture (sugarcane), which erases cultural identity, encourages migration, and creates the huge belts of misery around the megapolis of Manila, the capital of the Philippines, where 13 million people live.

That is the story of Hacienda Luisita, a large swath of countryside that has been cultivated with sugarcane since the Spanish colonization. It continues under the hands of big landowners, who still have the same last names: Cojuangco, Marcos, and Aquino. These are governors of the Philippines who are drenched in money, with American Dream

lifestyles, trips abroad, designer clothes, big parties, waste, and ostentation. All this is based on the exploitation of a workforce of thousands of peasants that live around the five villages that are all named after the second generation of the Cojuangco sisters: Carmen, Corazón, Josefina, Pacita, and Teresita. The community is surrounded by Country Golf Club Luisita, gated subdivisions, a complete sporting complex, a Spanish styled social club, a reception hall, a pool, picnic area, and egotism and colonization heightened to the max.



## *2. Our arrival, with gestures and smiles*



We veer to the right, off the superhighway, onto a narrower paved road. The road has some potholes that have been filled in by the local residents in exchange for a few coins from visitors. Once we get onto the dirt road we feel like we are really in rural Philippines. A few faces on the way smile and greet us typically – “Hi Joe.” This is surely another part

of colonialism inherited during the United States occupation during World War II, when the U.S. “liberated” the Philippines from Japan. From what we understand, for them all foreigners are “Joe,” a hero bearing gifts. We arrive bearing solidarity and smiles.



We pull over to the side and let Pau, the adolescent-commander, in, who had been riding behind us in a motorcycle-taxi. He gets in, greets us with smiles, and hugs Jayson. I sit next to him and, with camera in hand, start recording the flavor of the Filipino countryside. The adolescent-commander makes hand signals along the way, surely to his allies. We arrive at a plantation where the ground is being prepared to plant melons. A friend comes out and greets us. He welcomes us to Hacienda Luisita, and we continue in the car along narrow roads surrounded by sugarcane. We finally get to a small hut, the location of our upcoming meeting with a peasant leader, who will tell us about the massacre at *Hacienda Luisita*.

*“Buenos días, buenos días, morning, morning, magandang umanga!”* We are greeted by young men, no older than 15, who size up the situation and tell us where there is water to drink and wash our hands. Twenty minutes later, Carlitos, the peasant leader, arrives in a motorcycle-taxi. With a cigarette in his mouth, he greets us and shares the history of *Hacienda Luisita*.



### 3. *Hacienda Luisita, 2004 massacre*



The hacienda, owned by ex-president, Corazón Aquino, is dedicated to sugarcane monoculture to produce sugar and liquor, such as rum. Thousands of peasants work on the hacienda, most of whom are from the nearby countryside, but some of whom are brought from other Filipino islands as cheap labor.

When the Agrarian Reform Law was passed in the Philippines, many large properties were broken

up and handed over to the peasants. Nevertheless, *Hacienda Luisita* remained intact to remind us that the landowning Cojuangco Aquino family is untouchable and is above the constitution and the law. Because of this injustice, the workers went on strike in 2004.

Support for the workers came all the way from Manila and Quezon City. Many people walked to the hacienda to support the cause. Cory Aquino's son,



Ninoy Cojuangco, is accused of leading the massacre that moved the whole world.

Carlitos lights another cigarette and tells us how all the workers cried at the loss of their friends at the hands of the Filipino police and army. There are moments when his eyes fill with tears, but he suddenly smiles and says that the struggle continues to this day – the government of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo still doesn't recognize their rights or the land on which they live. The adolescent-commander announces that he will bring food for everyone, so Carlitos hurries to finish the story of the peasant struggles in the Philippines.

“What we want now is to break the pattern of the monoculture of sugarcane and, on some communal lands, plant other foods – it is a question of politics. We plant *ampalaya* (a type of bitter melon, good for diabetics), melon, rice, and fruit.

Carlitos hasn't finished telling us the whole story, but the young people have already set up a low table made of gigantic banana leaves, where they place white rice, fish, eggplant salad, and a type of cold soup made from chicken entrails. Arturo comments that the food isn't copious, but it is nutritious. It is a matter of Filipino identity not to consume lavish products.

We can see that the situation on Hacienda Luisita is very similar to that of the Aztra sugar refinery in the Ecuadorian province of Cañar. Both were acquired with loans from Social Security; both were the locations of massacres at the hands of each country's respective armies; both received national and international solidarity; and both were condemned for the massacres of the sugarcane workers, who exem-

plify the suffering from the effects of the hacienda and unjust land ownership, unfortunate conditions and legacies of Spanish colonialism.

We drink a lot of water and enjoy lentils with rice. The cheerful cock-a-doodle-doo of a red rooster reminds us that we are in a place of struggle and resistance against the global hegemonic system.

Carlitos continues the story of the struggle against domination, occupation, exploitation, and the valiant resistance of the Filipino people. “We have resisted for many generations. The November 2004 strike was very violent and full of repression. Forty people died, 133 people were arrested, and hundreds disappeared. Among the murdered were two children, two and five years old, who died asphyxiated by the tear gas shot by the police. One of the victims was strangled after being shot – his body was hung on the door of the factory.

At least 35 people were seriously injured by firearms. Between puffs of cigarette smoke and expressive gestures, Carlitos has involved his audience in his story. Meanwhile, Michelin shoots... photos; Alfred, Evy, Veronique, and Fanny take notes; and Arturo has regressed to his youth, in an almost magical way – the dialectic string of time has allowed him to relive and remember, through solidarity and through planetary injustice. It is the games, or black holes, of the non-western way of thinking that allow us to understand that the doors of perception and time are erased by other ways of thinking and living.

Carlitos continues talking before our intent gazes, with a few jokes and smiles, and with the almost simultaneous interpretation from Tagalog to

English by Jayson. He tells of how the more than five thousand factory workers and sugarcane growers from Hacienda Luisita went on strike. The members of the Tarlac Sugar Workers' Union (CATLU) barricaded Door No. 2 to the factory, while those from the Luisita Workers' Union (ULWU) blocked Door No. 1.

They decided to strike after 327 workers belonging to the ULWU were suddenly fired, including the president, vice president, and several leaders. It was their last option, after receiving no response to their multiple demands for better working conditions with regular hours, hospitalization and basic health care benefits, education, and housing – in general, a better quality of life for the workforce that was being exploited by the owners, the infamous Cojuangco-Aquino family.

Carlitos accompanies us as we visit a few sites. We see some children who are happily laughing and others who are planting as their parents water the plants. A truck filled with soft drinks blocks the path of a man riding along on a great ox. Here, they are sometimes used for transportation. In the distance there is an endless sea of green fields, a mountain, the sun, and the laughter of Jayson and his friends.







## 4. A different man from Africa



On the way back, the van stops for a few minutes at a small village near another large sugarcane plantation, called Ayala. The children run up to see who has arrived and are surprised by the beauty of the women from Belgium – Veronique, Evy and Fanny. But they are even more interested in Alfred, the African from the Congo, who, dressed in blue pants and a red shirt with green chickens, laughs and greets them. The children comment that he is very tall, with big eyes...and that the color of his skin is different. Nevertheless, we feel the children's friendliness as they stop to pose for photos, as they

often do whenever people come from faraway lands, wearing different clothes and speaking different languages. Happiness is in the air, even though one feels the weight of the heat, the thirst, the hunger, the lack of clothing, the flies, the trash, the lack of potable water, the lack of the children's parents, and the sadness of a country filled with children with little almond eyes and smiles, making their way through the hard life they were given, somewhere between the colonialism of Hacienda Luisita and the free market of Manila.

## 5. *Conclusions for the road*



Pau, the adolescent-commander, says goodbye, and Carlitos, the leader, stays in the melon fields. We hug goodbye and thank them; the hand signals along the road come to an end. We begin our return on the same superhighway to Quezon City. The Philippine afternoon comes to an end. The countryside looks even greener and the sun has turned a strange golden tone that reminds us of the Latin American countryside. And with good reason – we see signs to Mexico, Los Angeles, and Valenzuela.

It feels like being near the U.S.-Mexico border.

While at first we don't understand, we later find out that the Philippines were used to train Mexican-born Spaniards under the Hacienda regime as an economic, social, and political development model, and even an ideological and cultural model. This was very similar to the large landholdings and plantations of Ecuador. I begin to think about the similarities and memories of the large Guantug planta-



tion in Cañar, where, as they worked in the wheat fields, the exploited peasants sang, “jahuay, jahuay, jahuaylla,” meaning rise, rise, with strength.

With strength, and always rising! Don’t falter in the struggle, Filipino friends!

The colonial hacienda system remained for many decades in places that were colonized by Spain. In many areas, the effects still remain. For example, “surnaming” is a deep-rooted custom in the Philippines and most of the presidents have had Spanish second surnames: Marcos, Aquino, Arroyo. This is very similar to many parts of the South American sierra, where having a Spanish surname is synonymous with nobility and riches.

Perhaps because of this, the Filipino people don’t like to speak Spanish; it reminds them of the harsh colonization, the hacienda, and vassalage. Tagalog is a way for them to maintain their cultural identity.



## 6. *Returning to the path of the other urban struggle.*



We enter Quezon City and are greeted once again by the noise, the hellish traffic, the smog, the people, the cars, people running to work and home, and the advertisements for Japanese food, dance halls, massage parlors, McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and Jolibbe (a Filipino fast-food joint). We finally let go of the beautiful fresh Filipino afternoon, the countryside, the golden sun, the irrigation canals, and the never-ending crops.

I think in blue and green, just like the third day we were here, during the workshop in the city of Antipolo. We participated in an icebreaker in which we were told: *think in green (the Earth) and blue (the sea). Close your eyes. Mix these two colors and you will receive the sensibility you need to care for the Earth. Its aura and energy will come out. Meanwhile, enjoy the sounds of the Andes in the Philippines – those sounds don't die. They are like icons of resistance against the hegemonic system...*

We arrive home and Hacienda Luisita is now far away. But neocolonialism and exploitation has been brought to the great concrete jungle, to the factories that multinationals like Kawasaki and Adidas operate close to the shanty towns of Manila, near Muntinlupa, *between the tunnels and*

*bridges of hell*, between the poverty of the trash-choked lake with green water. Nevertheless, it is there that the organization, solidarity, and justice of the women of Gabriela are writing their life stories, testimony, myths, and legends.







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